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Liminal places and communities for youth transformation



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The dilemma

- The bridge between the institutional frames of youth and of adult is shaky at best
- Young adults (18-25) stuck and seeking support
- No statutory or voluntary agencies with a remit of support



The Stoneleigh Project

- Stoneleigh Group: network of voluntary youth organisations
- Shared purpose: the development of young people in transition to adulthood through volunteer work
- Collaborated to develop a spiritual development project for young adult volunteers
- Intention: to support the development of their values in order to help them become ‘agents of change’ – active citizens - in their communities
- Idea: to immerse them in a retreat environment and support them in community work initiatives



The ‘theory of change’

- ‘Those who are marginalised in society are best placed to bring about the necessary changes – they have the least to lose and the most to gain.’

How well does
it work?

'It's changed my life!'





My question for this presentation

- What are the consequences of this youth development programme in relation to personal and social transformation
 - *what worked?*
- What part did power and control play in the curriculum of the Camas retreat
 - *how did it work?*
- How did participants exercise citizenship?



■ Contexts

- The new youth: a ‘car ride’
- New roles for youth work
- New applications of outdoor youth work

■ Approach

- Critical ethnography with a participative twist.



Unpacking the Stoneleigh Project: introducing Bernstein

- Education's purpose to develop citizens with rights and responsibilities
- Collection and integrated curricula
 - Strong and weak 'classification' - power
 - Strong and weak 'framing' - control
 - Shallow and deep knowledge
- Identity and socialisation
 - Society's need for 'conforming and flexible' people requires society to redistribute power and control i.e. weak classification and framing

Suggests an integrated curriculum approach



Bernstein's concerns

■ Power over

- Schools maintain the established order through submissive and compliant students (collection curriculum)
 - Old cultural arrangements remain

However

- New curricula give access to private and social worlds (integrated curriculum)
 - Reduced space for diverse ideologies

Camas as opportunity and threat



Bernstein's hopes

■ Power with

- New ways of constructing knowledge that are shared
- New distribution of power and control
- A participatory democracy of citizens
- Transformation of culture

*Camas potential: 'communitas' and
'liminality'*



Questions for the ‘integrated curriculum’ of Camas

- The benefits of new power and knowledge relations resulting in new possibilities

Versus the issues of

- Individuals crossing the border from the retreat into the everyday world
- Institutions crossing the border into the everyday world of the participants



Camas



A participant's view

- The Camas Centre is situated on the North West coastline of the island enjoying unforgettable views of Staffa from it's own secluded bay. It is a row of remote ex-fishing cottages with no electricity, central heating or running hot water in fact... if I were to say an open fire and a cold tap you'd have a better understanding of Camas, oh yeah...almost forgot no flushing toilets! I think you get the picture.

(Mick Wood, http://www.infed.org/leadership/wood_spirituality.htm)



*How it works:
the people*



Camas
Camas



How it works: the people

- Volunteer - trust
- intergenerational community - many options for different power relationships
- Simple lifestyle - domestic work
- Mutuality - being valued, reciprocity
- Facilitated conflict resolution

Communitas



*How it works:
the place*

Camas
Camas



How it works: the place

- Unfamiliar and remote - possibility
- Wild and natural - agency
- Dramatic and beautiful - the other
- Storied and meaningful - narrative

A landscape of liminality



*How it works:
the experiences*

Camas
Camas



How it works: the experiences

- An emergent and negotiated day
- Creative
- Values oriented
- Reflective - narrative base
- Experience is more than activity

Emergent and diverse personal narratives



Camas
Camas



Camas unpacked

- Integrated curricula with weak classification and framing
- The shock of something radically new held by the community and stimulated by the vitality of the landscape
- ‘Self-assessment’ through emergent and diverse personal narratives
- Spirituality - wary
- Formal outdoor pursuits - rejected!



Communitas

- An integrated system of egalitarian power relations and knowledge construction
 - New possibilities for self expression and relationships in action
 - Trust, mutuality, reciprocity
 - Co-creation



Liminality

- A stimulating landscape
- A landscape of possibility
- Onto which to tentatively map new identities and relations



Citizenship

- Most transformed themselves
 - belief in 'progress' and 'individual agency' led to reproduction of established institutional concepts of adult selves
 - Status quo - Bernstein's worst fears!
- Some then transformed others
 - valuing of rights and responsibilities
 - Tackling the problems of society but not the causes
- A few transformed the culture of their community depending on the ideology of the voluntary organisation - the more local the more radical!
 - radical political change.
 - Tackling the cultural roots of social problems.
 - Bernstein's best hope!



Camas
Camas



Conclusions

- *What worked?* Most young adults crossed the ‘border’ and sustained constructive development (95%: n = 165)
- *How did it work?* A retreat based approach offers an ‘integrated curriculum’ and does restore young adults to healthy life paths.
 - Environmental *liminality* and social *communitas* were significant elements in this experience.
- *Citizenship* The framing of the host youth organisation determined whether the participant reproduced or transformed the norms of adult identity or the social world in which these norms were embedded.



Dissemination

Cae Mabon

Gillerthwaite

